

I Know We're Cool by TheAddict4Dramatics

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Summary: 'Stupidly he hadn't considered the possibility they might run into her. But now it seemed obvious they were very likely too. It was their daughter's birthday so of course she had come to visit her. He'd travelled all the way from Hawkins to come to her grave, why wouldn't Diane come across town to do the same.' Post 2x09. Angst turning into redemption and fluff.

I Know We're Cool

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Lyrics from Gwen Stefani's 'Cool'.

I Know We're Cool

We have changed but we're still the same

And after all that we've been through

I know we're cool

"Jim?"

Hopper snapped his head round at the sound of his name from a familiar sounding voice. Diane stood behind him looking surprised but not displeased to see him. Stupidly he hadn't considered the possibility they might run into her. But now it seemed obvious they were very likely too. It was their daughter's birthday so of course she had come to visit her. He'd travelled all the way from Hawkins to come to her grave, why wouldn't Diane come across town to do the same.

"I didn't know... I wasn't expecting to see you." Diane said after a moment's pause.

She tripped over tongue trying to find the right thing to say. Hopper couldn't blame her – he was feeling just as uncomfortable. Still Hopper said nothing. He could feel Joyce's quiet presence behind his back as the moments of silence dragged on. Diane looked increasingly uncomfortable and just as she was about to turn her back and flee he finally found his voice:

"Hi. Sorry I should have called or something, told you I was coming. It was kind of a last minute decision."

"No, not at all. You have just as much right to be here as me." Diane told him sincerely and for some reason even that appeared to choke

him up a little.

She seemed to sense his emotion as the next thing he knew she had stepped forward and manhandled him into an awkward hug. They lingered there for several moments. Both reeled at how unnatural it felt to be in each other's arms again when there had been a time in their lives when it had felt like the most natural thing in the world. That had been many years ago though and so much had passed between them since. He knew the embrace wasn't comfortable for either of them and yet it somehow needed to happen – the figurative breaking of the ice.

As they pulled apart Hopper suddenly remembered Joyce standing behind him. He turned to face her and to his relief she wasn't looking in any way put out; her expression was unreadable and he knew she was just waiting to follow his lead. He knew this couldn't be easy or comfortable for her either but he also knew she would never say that and if possible he felt a little bit more in love with her then.

"Joyce, this is Diane, Sara's mum." Joyce took a step forward to stand next to him as he spoke. Following his lead, as quietly supportive as she always was. "Diane this is Joyce, my wife."

He saw Diane's eyes widen in surprise at the news. He inwardly cursed. Should he have rang her and told her he had remarried? He wasn't exactly sure what the protocol was. They were ex-spouses but they had a dead child that would keep them forever connected; an unspeakable, unimaginable trauma that only the two of them understood. Perhaps he should have called.

"Wife? You got married?" Diane asked, her eyes still round with shock.

"Yeah, a couple of months ago. That was kind of a last minute decision too." Hopper explained, turning to share a knowing smile with Joyce as he did so. He clocked Diane giving them a look he couldn't quite decipher.

They'd got married on a complete whim at a 24-hour wedding chapel in the city with a couple of pawnshop rings and two witnesses they had pulled from the street. It was mad. And the kids had been furious

but it was also romantic as hell and Hopper couldn't bring himself to regret it no matter how hard he tried. They were having to throw a big wedding reception party, which the children demanded they were in charge of organising, to make it up to them but he didn't think he would have done it any other way. Just him and Joyce looking up at him all starry eyed like he'd literally hung the moon. It had been perfect.

"It's a pleasure to meet you." Joyce said, bringing him back to the present as she offered her hand to the other woman in greeting. Diane stepped forward and took it, shaking it and smiling generously.

"Pleasure's mine."

The unlikely trio fell into a natural silence that quickly began to feel uncomfortable. Hopper hadn't spoken to Diane in well over a year, perhaps longer, and the conversation had not exactly gone well. The last time he had called was when Will had been missing and Joyce's grief was bringing back a lot of awful memories of his own that, at the time, had been close to drowning him. He was in a much a better place now but still one look at Diane was enough to bring to the surface all the pain they had shared and exactly what they had lost.

Diane let her eyes wander to Sara's grave and she paused at the fresh bouquet of flowers that stood out bright and vivid against the grey headstone.

"The flowers are lovely." Dianne commented quietly, a clear attempt to end the painful silence. Fortunately Joyce stepped up to respond because Hopper was struggling to breathe with the feeling of it all let alone speak.

"I know it's cliché and probably stupid but I guess it was just my way of saying hello." Joyce explained. She had noticed straight away that Dianne had not come bearing flowers and Hopper had never suggested brining any with them but he hadn't objected when she had, still she was beginning to think it may have been a mistake.

"Not it's not stupid at all. That blue was her favourite colour."

Joyce could see Diane's eyes cloud over with tears as a dozen

unspoken memories flashed across her mind. She heard Hopper grind his teeth beside her but she didn't dare turn to look at him. The combined grief of the two parents surrounded and overwhelmed her and she took an unconscious step forward towards the woman standing opposite her.

"I know it's not my place to say but I am very sorry for your loss." Another cliché. And so inadequate to express how she felt, even more inadequate to provide any real comfort but still she felt she needed to say it. She needed to do something. Joyce reached out and held Diane's wrist as she spoke and to her surprise Diane placed her other hand over hers to hold it there.

"Thank you." She whispered tearfully, looking Joyce straight in the eye with honest gratitude shining there, even amongst the overwhelming grief. When they broke apart, Diane wiped at her eyes quietly before she continued: "Do you have any children Joyce?"

"Yes, two boys," Joyce answered immediately. She paused slightly, looking to Hopper but he still had his head turned away from them, lost in his own thoughts. Joyce didn't know what Diane knew of Jane, if anything, and it was hardly an appropriate time to go into it so instead she continued, "... and a daughter. All teenagers now."

"Wow."

"Yeah." Joyce agreed and they shared a laugh that held an understanding only possible between two mothers. Once they were quiet again the atmosphere seemed to fall heavy and serious once more. Joyce swallowed nervously, unsure whether she should say her next thought or not. She glanced at Hopper who was still refusing to look in their direction and decided to say it anyway. She felt Diane needed to hear it and completely selfishly she needed to say it: "We all love him very much."

"Good." Diane replied at once, nodding her head to affirm her words. There were tears in her eyes but it was different than before. "I'm glad to hear that, truly I am." Joyce smiled, knowing she had made the right decision.

Finally Hopper turned back towards them. He reached out to Joyce,

threading his fingers through hers and squeezing them affectionately as he did so.

"Do you guys want to head into town and grab a coffee?.. Or a beer? Might be nice to... catch up." Diane asked, sounding unsure of herself. "Unless you need to get back for the kids?"

He looked at Joyce. She was still waiting patiently to follow his lead.

"Sure, sounds good." He replied after a moments pause. Diane and Hopper began to walk away but Joyce stayed put, causing a tug on Hopper's arm. He turned to face her.

"I can always hang back, if you'd prefer to go alone." He gave her an incredulous look. "I don't mind Hop, honestly."

"Don't be stupid. I want you to come." He tugged gently on her arm until she was walking alongside him.

Hopper watched Joyce intently as she ordered another round of beers from a barman that was taking a very keen interest in his wife. Joyce was of course too polite to say anything, instead nodding and smiling to all of his pointless comments, and he was clearly taking her lack of a rebuff as encouragement. Hopper could feel Diane watching him from across the table where they sat. When he turned back to face her he saw her looking at him with an entirely too amused expression. She could tell what he was thinking – the barman wasn't exactly being subtle and Diane knew more than most how acute his jealous streak could be.

It still felt odd to be here with Diane, sitting and catching up like old friends instead of two devastated, broken people that only reminded the other of their joint pain and suffering. He had assumed Diane's suggestion of having a few drinks would be awkward. He'd said yes because he felt he ought to and in the spirit of making amends, not because he had actually wanted to. But it hadn't been awkward in the slightest. In fact he was enjoying himself, as much as he could enjoy anything on this particular day of the year.

"She's lovely." Diane commented quietly when Hopper took another glance in Joyce's direction. He smiled slightly at Diane's words. He

didn't know why but it pleased him that Diane seemed to genuinely like Joyce.

"I know."

"And also, if I may say, completely out of your league." Diane teased. He couldn't remember the last time they had had a conversation this light and playful. Somehow, today of all days, all of the burden between them seemed to have lifted a little bit and given them some space to form a connection outside of their shared grief.

"I know that too. But don't tell her, she doesn't seem to have worked that out yet." Diane laughed at his answer before replying:

"Don't worry your secret is safe with me. How did you two meet anyway?"

"We grew up together in Hawkins. We were friends in High School." Hopper replied absent-mindedly. He looked up from the beer bottle he had been studying to see Diane still watching him intently. Apparently that vague answer wasn't going to do. Hopper took a big breath, trying to work out how best to explain how he and Joyce ended up falling together as they had. "I didn't really see her when I moved back to Hawkins." But then he hadn't really seen anyone that he didn't work with or wasn't casually sleeping with when he had first moved back. "But then a couple of years back Joy's youngest son went missing. I led the search for him and we found him... eventually after a few days and I... saved him. I literally saved his life in way that I could never save Sara's and somehow it... it made me better. It's like it redeemed me or something." He stopped abruptly when he felt the emotion about to overtake him. He hadn't meant to say that much at all but he hadn't been able to stop himself once he'd started.

Diane was looking at him with nothing but compassion and understanding in her eyes and he forgot what a good listener she was, had been, before their world had been torn apart. She got him and what he meant because she understood all of the things he felt that others just couldn't possibly understand, even Joyce. Diane lent across the table and placed her hand over Hopper's wrist, stroking it slightly.

"It's okay to be happy Jim. We're allowed to be okay, to move on. It doesn't mean we don't miss her and it doesn't mean we love her any less... it means we're living our lives for us and for her." She told him sincerely.

She had managed to voice all of his fear about being so happy with Joyce and the makeshift family they had made. She had voiced and soothed all of his concerns in one sentence and his chest felt physically lighter because of it. He nodded his silent thanks to her.

Joyce made her way back over from the bar a few moments later, she had three beers in her hands and a barman that was staring appreciatively at her ass with every step. Diane withdrew her hand from Hopper's arm as Joyce came back, causing Hopper to turn and look in Joyce's direction. He clocked the barman behind her and instantly scowled, muttering something about the guy being a 'pervy asshole'.

Joyce handed out the beers and took her seat next to Hopper. He reached out and placed a hand over her thigh as soon as she had sat down – he needed the physical reassurance of her today and kept finding himself seeking out her touch in some way, to feel her constantly soothed him a little. He didn't dwell on just how needy that probably made him appear. Not that Joyce seemed to care in the least and he decided in that moment that he didn't either. If she was what got him through today and all the other days that threatened to overwhelm him than he would appear as needy as he damn well pleased.

"I was just telling Jim I bet I could still beat his ass at pool." Diane announced suddenly causing both Joyce and Hopper to look up at her in surprise. "What do you say big guy, brave enough to take me on?"

"You bet." He replied determinedly. He caught Joyce's genuine smirk at his words and revelled once again in how un-weird this was turning out to be.

"Ha ha!" Joyce shouted out, triumphant in her win. She threw her hands, and consequently her pool cue, above her head in celebration. Hopper and Diane laughed as they watched on from the bar.

Diane had been very correct in her statement that she could still beat her ex-husband at pool and she had done exactly that, twice. At some point during the proceedings Bill had turned up too and had just had his ass handed to him by Joyce. Even Bill's appearance had not made Hopper feel uncomfortable. He used to hold so much resentment towards the man – he had everything Hopper had lost – Diane and a living child. But now he could see how unfair that had been on Bill. He'd saved Diane, given her everything she needed to survive the loss of Sara, given her what Hopper would never have been able to himself. And now surprisingly all Hopper felt towards the man was gratitude. Though the numerous beers already consumed may have been influencing him slightly.

Joyce made her way over to Hopper as Diane left his side to go and commiserate with Bill. Joyce's smile was wide and uninhibited, a sure sign she too had drank quite a lot. Her eyes were twinkling with mischief and Hopper was more than happy to stand and watch her.

"Congrats." He told her as she stood in front of him.

"Thanks. Does this mean I'm winning the new spouse battle?" She asked him playfully, twirling a piece of hair around her fingers as she did so. Blatantly flirting with him in a public place. Yeah she'd definitely had some drinks.

He pulled her flush against him and leaned down to kiss her firmly on the lips. It was probably a little too firm considering they were in public but he wanted to. And he also wanted to prove a point to the bartender that was still looking at Joyce like he wanted to devour her whole. There had been one point in which Diane had had to physically hold him back as Joyce had leaned far over the table to pocket a ball and the barman had let out a low whistle behind them. That guy really did have it coming to him.

"No I think it means I'm winning the new spouse battle." Hopper informed her quietly as they pulled apart, his voice just as teasing as hers.

"I love you." She replied at once and this time there was nothing playful in her tone only an earnest honesty. Hopper raised his eyebrows slightly at the serious turn her half-drunken brain had just

made. She was gazing up at him again with the same look she had had on their wedding night – as if she couldn't believe he was there in front of her, she couldn't believe he was hers.

"Careful sweetheart, last time you told me that in a New York bar we ended up getting hitched. God knows what could happen this time." He continued to tease her, doing his best to ignore just how strong a reaction that look of hers seemed to produce within him.

"I'm not sure there's that much left that we could do to shock people."

"Oh you are so wrong there baby." He all but purred at her and then cut off her laugh with another not entirely suitable kiss.

They were interrupted by someone clearing their throats behind them. Bill and Diane had come over to announce their departure and say their goodbyes. Hopper pulled Diane in for a hug that couldn't have felt more different to the one they had shared earlier by Sara's graveside. There was no awkwardness or discomfort anymore just the silent companionship of two people that had known each other for many years. He told her to hug her little one for him and she told him to do the same to his family for her. He even embraced Bill, an entirely new and not as uncomfortable a situation. But as he pulled away he saw Diane and Joyce embracing fiercely and for the second time that afternoon felt a strong bubble of happiness burst in his chest at the sight of the two of them getting on so well. After all the years of turmoil that had followed him now he felt something akin to peace settle around him.

As the others left Hopper pulled Joyce into the side of him and wrapped his arms around her, his lips resting against the top of her head. She propped her chin on his chest to look up at him:

"So what were you saying about shocking people earlier?" The seriousness was gone, replaced once again by the tipsy flirtation instead.

He didn't reply verbally instead indicating to the bathroom on the other side of the room with his head. She turned to look at what he meant and then burst out laughing as she realised exactly what his lewd suggestion was.

"If we get caught and arrested and it makes its way back to Hawkins..."

"Then people will be very shocked. Mission accomplished." Hopper teased as he looked down at her with nothing but suggestion playing in his eyes.

She considered him for a moment. They couldn't actually do this, could they? It was absurd and illegal and he was the chief of police for Christ's sake. But then she couldn't really deny him anything on this day, couldn't say no to anything that might make him feel better or more alive. And besides now she was truly considering it the idea was making her rather hot.

Joyce pulled away from him suddenly, taking a couple of steps backwards before offering her hand out to him.

"For the record if we do get caught I'm telling everyone it was your idea." She said pointedly but she couldn't keep her face straight for long. She giggled at him mischievously.

"Deal!"

Hopper laughed back as he grabbed her hand and began to push her in the direction of the bathroom. He made sure to look back towards the bar as he went, delighting in the utterly sour look now painting the bartender's face.

For the first time in a long time this day was not going to drown him. For the first time in a long time he was okay.